

DAILY LIFE

1920-1929

Youth in the Roaring Twenties

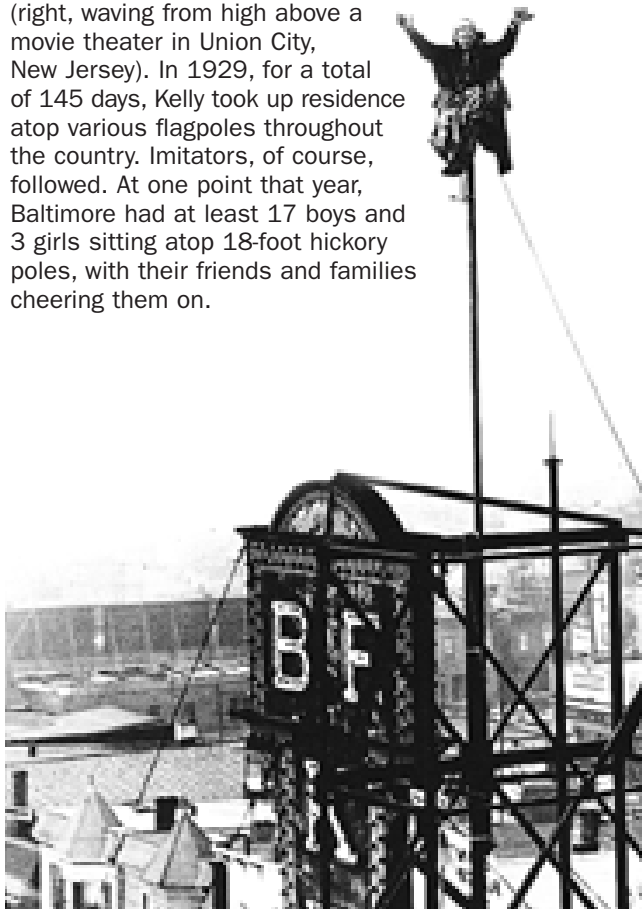
The decade known as the Roaring Twenties was a celebration of youth and its culture. Crazy and frenetic dances, silly songs, and radically new styles of clothing captured the public's fancy.

During this period of relative prosperity, many people questioned the values of the past and were willing to experiment with new values and behavior as well as with new fashions. This was an especially liberating period for women, who received the right to vote in 1920. Many women also opted for a liberating change of fashion—short skirts and short hair—as well as the freedom to smoke and drink in public.



▼ FLAGPOLE SITTING

One of the more bizarre fads of the 1920s began in 1924 as a publicity stunt to attract viewers to movie theaters. The most famous flagpole sitter was “Shipwreck” Kelly (right, waving from high above a movie theater in Union City, New Jersey). In 1929, for a total of 145 days, Kelly took up residence atop various flagpoles throughout the country. Imitators, of course, followed. At one point that year, Baltimore had at least 17 boys and 3 girls sitting atop 18-foot hickory poles, with their friends and families cheering them on.



BESSIE SMITH ►

Bessie Smith was “Empress of the Blues.” In 1923, she sold a million recordings of “Down Hearted Blues.”





◀ BOBBED HAIR

In keeping with the liberating influence of their new clothing, women bobbed their hair—that is, they had it cut much shorter—freeing themselves of the long tresses that had been fashionable for years. The woman shown is having her hair cut at a barber shop.



◀ DANCE FADS

The Charleston was the dance craze of the 1920s. An energetic dance that involved wild, flailing movements of the arms and legs, it demanded an appropriate costume for the woman dancer—a short, straight dress without a waistline.

Another craze was the dance marathon, a contest in which couples would dance continuously for days—taking a 15-minute break every hour—with each alternately holding up the other as he or she slept. Needless to say, dancers dropped from exhaustion.

▼ GENTLEMEN'S FASHIONS

Gentlemen enjoyed some outrageous fashions of their own. This young man, with the aid of two flappers, displays the latest fashion in trousers, sometimes called Oxford bags. He also sports “patent-leather hair,” parted on the side or in the middle and slicked down close to the head.



DATA

FILE

SCHOOL DAYS, SCHOOL DAYS

During the 1920s, children studied reading, writing, and arithmetic in elementary school. In high school, students also studied history and literature and had vocational training. Girls learned cooking and sewing, and boys learned woodworking.

Slang Expressions

crush	an infatuation
gatecrasher	someone who attends an event uninvited or without paying
keen	attractive or appealing
ritzy	elegant
scram	to leave in a hurry
screwy	crazy
bee's knees	a superb person or thing

RADIO

- KDKA, Pittsburgh, the first commercial radio station, went on the air on November 2, 1920. It was owned by Westinghouse.
- In 1922, 500 radio stations were in operation in the United States.
- In 1924, over 3 million radios were in use throughout the United States. By the end of the 1920s, over 10 million radios were in use. Popular radio shows included *Amos 'n' Andy* and *Jones and Hare*.

SONG TITLES

“Baby Face”	“I Want to Be Happy”
“Barney Google”	“Let A Smile Be Your Umbrella”
“Blue Skies”	“Makin’ Whoopie”
“Bye Bye Blackbird”	“My Blue Heaven”
“Charleston”	“My Heart Stood Still”
“Crazy Rhythm”	“Singin’ in the Rain”

THINKING CRITICALLY

CONNECT TO TODAY

- 1. Comparing** With a small group, listen to several of the songs listed above or to others from the period. Discuss their lyrics and melodies, and compare them with those of popular songs today. What commonalities can you find? How does the music from each period reflect its times? Report your findings to the class.



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R8.

CONNECT TO HISTORY

- 2. Researching Clothing Styles** Find out more about the clothing styles just before the flapper era. How severe were the changes in fashion in the 1920s? How do you think parents of flappers reacted to these changes? If you had lived at this time, would you have chosen to wear the new styles? Why or why not?



RESEARCH LINKS

CLASSZONE.COM